R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 011 009 SP 000 609

A CASE STUDY IN PREPARING TEACHERS FOR THE DISADVANTAGED, PROJECT 120--A SPECIAL STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC AREAS.

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PUB DATE DEC 64

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.09 HC-$0.44 11P.

DESCRIPTORS- *SCHOOL COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP, *STUDENT TEACHING, *TEACHER EDUCATION, *TEACHER RECRUITMENT, *URBAN SCHOOLS, NEW YORK CITY

PROJECT 120 ASSISTS SPECIAL SERVICE SCHOOLS IN RECRUITING AND HOLDING TEACHERS, TRAINS TEACHERS TO WORK IN URBAN SCHOOLS FOR THE DISADVANTAGED, AND EXPLORES FACTORS THAT WILL IMPROVE TEACHER EDUCATION FOR URBAN SCHOOLS. THE SPECIAL PROGRAM IS ANNOUNCED TO UNDERGRADUATES WHO HAVE QUALIFIED FOR STUDENT TEACHING. IN ADDITION TO CONVENTIONAL SUPERVISION, PARTICIPANTS ARE REGULARLY VISITED BY THE PROJECT COORDINATOR. THEY ALSO VISIT COMMUNITY AGENCIES AND INTERVIEW COMMUNITY LEADERS. EVERY EFFORT IS MADE TO FAMILIARIZE THE STUDENT TEACHERS WITH THE COMMUNITY AND TO DISPEL ANY FEARS AND PREJUDICES THEY MAY HAVE ABOUT DEPRIVED AREAS AND THEIR RESIDENTS. SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1960, PROJECT 120 HAS HAD 21 TO 32 ENROLLEES ANNUALLY, AVERAGING ABOUT 10 PERCENT OF HUNTER COLLEGE STUDENT TEACHERS. ALMOST 80 PERCENT ACCEPTED TEACHING POSITIONS AT THE SCHOOLS WHERE THEY DID THEIR STUDENT TEACHING, WITH A LARGE PROPORTION STILL THERE 4 YEARS LATER. AT J.H.S. 120, WHERE THE PROJECT BEGAN, 23 OF THE 95 TEACHERS ARE PROJECT GRADUATES. THEY WERE JUDGED TO HAVE BEEN HELPFUL WITH EACH YEAR'S INCOMING PROJECT STUDENT TEACHERS. (RP)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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A CASE STUDY

in

PREPARING TEACHERS FOR THE DISADVANTAGED

PROJECT 120

A Special Student Teaching Program
in Junior High Schools in Low Socio-Economic Areas

submitted for

The Distinguished Achievement Award

of the

American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education

by

Hunter College of the City University of New York
Herbert Schueler, Director of Teacher Education

December, 1964

SP000 609

SUMMARY

A CASE STUDY

in

PREPARING TEACHERS FOR THE DISADVANTAGED
Project 120 -- A Special Student Teaching Program
in Junior High Schools in Low Socio-Economic Areas

Project 120 is a pilot program in Hunter College's attack on the problems of urban education. This special student teaching program, conducted in selected junior high schools that serve severely depressed areas, has assisted the cooperating schools with their staffing problems and has led the way at the College for a variety of studies and projects focused on the needs of urban schools. Students who volunteer and are accepted for the project do their student teaching in a school in a low socio-economic area, with the opportunity of being assigned to the same school as beginning teachers. As student teachers, they receive close, supportive supervision from the College and school staff, participate in a community orientation program, and are given a maximum of classroom teaching experience. The results of the project are dramatic, as measured by the number of graduates who have accepted assignments in these "difficult" schools, have remained in them, and have continued to grow in their ability to deal with the problems involved in teaching children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Perhaps even more significant, from a long range point of view, are the various research studies and demonstration projects concerned with urban education that have been stimulated at the College by the development of Project 120 and the attention the program has been given by other urban teacher education institutions, as they sought ways of improving their preparation of teachers for schools in depressed areas.

PREPARING TEACHERS FOR THE DISADVANTAGED
Project 120 -- A Special Student Teaching Program
in Junior High Schools in Low Socio-Economic Areas

Objectives of the Program:

A leading problem of schools serving depressed urban areas has been that of recruiting and holding effective teachers. New York City's "special service schools" * are no exception. At times the proportion of teachers who were assigned but rejected appointments to such schools in the Borough of Manhattan has run to 34 per cent, or even higher in the case of particular schools. Typically there is a high rate of turnover in the teaching staff of a special service school. Most of the appointees are beginning teachers who have had no special preparation for working with disadvantaged youth. Having accepted an appointment, they enter the school with grave forebodings because of the sensational stories they have heard and read in the press about the "blackboard jungle." Faced with classes made up of children from lower class backgrounds, they find themselves unable to communicate constructively with their pupils, and frequently resign or request transfer. These teachers, product of conventional teacher education programs, lack the background of experience and the insights that would contribute to successful teaching in these special service schools.

Project 120 has the triple objective of assisting special service schools in recruiting and holding a competent teaching staff, of providing future teachers with the special preparation they need to work successfully in schools in depressed urban areas, and of exploring factors that will improve teacher education for urban schools.

* These schools are so designated because they are given special services by the Board of Education to help them provide more effectively for the particular problems arising from the disadvantaged backgrounds of their pupils.

Description and Development of the Program:

Annex 1 is a pictorial description of the program which supplements the following account.

Project 120 began in the spring of 1960. It took its name from J.H.S. 120, Manhattan (located in Harlem), the first school which cooperated with Hunter College in this special student teaching program. Since that time, five other special service schools in deprived areas in Harlem and the East Bronx have participated in the program. The number of volunteers for the project and the projected needs of the schools determine how many of the cooperating schools will receive student teachers in a given semester, but a continuing relationship between the college and these schools is maintained.

The cooperating schools were selected on the basis of specific criteria. They serve depressed areas characterized by a high delinquency rate and a large proportion of families, as high as 75 per cent, on home relief. They had large numbers of vacancies on the teaching staff. They had a long-standing record of teacher-turnover. Finally, and of critical importance, their administrative staffs were willing and able to cooperate with Hunter College in the venture.

Basic premises on which the program has been developed are these. (1) Teaching, and student teaching, in special service schools can be professionally and personally challenging and rewarding. (2) Supervised experience in schools serving lower-class neighborhoods can dispell fears that are based on rumors and ignorance of actual conditions, thus releasing the future teacher to deal more effectively with the real problems of teaching and learning that exist in such schools. (3) A range of direct contacts with community leaders and agencies, as well as with the school's teachers and administrators, will enable the student teacher to gain insights concerning pupil backgrounds that

college and school personnel and a maximum amount of actual classroom experience will give the student teacher increased confidence and enhance his professional growth. (5) All those who have met requirements for admission to student teaching should be informed about the special program, but only those who volunteer should be considered for it. Volunteers should be screened by personal interview. (6) The prospective teacher will profit most from pre-service experience in the specific school in which he will eventually teach.

At the time the program was initiated, discussions with officials of the Board of Education resulted in an agreement that the student teachers would be placed in the specific vacancies for which they had prepared, provided they completed their student teaching satisfactorily, passed the required license examination, and still wished to be assigned to the school at the end of their service as student teachers. This "guaranteed placement" feature of the program has been modified recently, because of a new assignment system required by the contract between the Board of Education and the United Federation of Teachers, the official bargaining agent for New York City teachers. It seems probable, however, that graduates of the program will continue to have strong likelihood of assignment to the special service school in which they do their student teaching.

Project 120 provides a number of special features for the student teachers who participate in it. Perhaps these features, plus the factor of self-selection, are responsible for the high morale which develops within the group each semester.

The student teachers consult frequently with the project coordinator, who visits the schools each week for group and individual conferences and is available at other times as needed. The coordinator also visits classrooms, serves as liaison with the school staff, and arranges experiences through which the

facilities (as library), and special programs (as remedial reading) of the school.

In addition to their conferences with the coordinator, the student teachers in Project 120 receive the same supervision by college subject-matter specialists that is provided for all student teachers in secondary schools. This consists of at least five classroom observations, plus individual and bi-weekly group conferences.

The Project 120 group makes a series of visits to significant places in the school community, such as social agencies, religious institutions, places of recreation, and law enforcement agencies. They take part in interviews with community leaders, such as newspaper editors, political leaders, and leaders of community action groups. (See Annex 2 for the schedule of community visits during the current semester.) This community orientation program is arranged by a sociologist-psychologist who is intimately familiar with the area and who leads follow-up discussions, during which the student teachers have opportunity to reflect on and clarify the significance of their observations.

Student teachers in Project 120 have maximum teaching experience, within the limits of their college course schedules. After an initial period of orientation and observation, the student teacher has his "own" class (or classes) which he teaches regularly.

The enrollment in Project 120 has varied from six to ten in the fall term, when the roster of student teachers is typically low, to from 15 to 22 in the spring term, averaging about ten per cent of the student teachers at this level. Academically, the enrollees range from those who just meet standards for admission to student teaching to those who have achieved outstanding records. They include a cross-section of ethnic and religious backgrounds. The common characteristic among them seems to be that they volunteered and were accepted for the project.

The program has been and will continue to be modified in the details of its operation, but the essential structure continues to reflect the premises on which it was developed.

Personnel Involved:

The only special personnel are the coordinator, who devotes slightly more than one-third of her time to Project 120, and the sociologist-psychologist who conducts the community orientation program, giving the equivalent of one-fifth of a regular teaching load to this assignment. The standard supervision of Project 120 student teachers is provided by members of the regular staff of supervisors.

Budget:

There is not and has not been a separate budget for Project 120.

Evaluation of the Program:

Measured against the objectives of the program, Project 120 has had substantial and continuing success. Almost 80 per cent of the graduates have taken teaching positions in the school where they did their student teaching, and a large proportion of them are still there. Most of those who have left the schools departed after two or more years of successful service for personal reasons, usually marriage and family responsibilities. Of the remaining group, some could not be appointed to the particular school because anticipated vacancies did not materialize; most of them are teaching successfully in other special service schools. Only a few were not appointed or left for reasons that may be classified as professional -- favorable opportunities to pursue graduate work account for some of these, while the rest were unwilling or unable to cope with the problems of teaching in schools in depressed areas.

At J.H.S. 120, Manhattan, where the program has been in continuous operation since 1960, 23 members of the staff of 95 are graduates of the project. Here, as well as in other cooperating schools, the "veterans" of the program with two or more years of experience are now serving as cooperating teachers

for the current crop of Project 120 student teachers.

Administrators in the cooperating schools report that Project 120 graduates encounter far few difficulties than other beginning teachers and that they deal more effectively with the problems that do arise. Such comments as, "Mr. B. has carried his weight from the day he began," or "We could use a dozen like Miss M. She knows how to teach these youngsters," are typical. The graduates themselves stress the functional nature of the preparation they received for teaching in "difficult" schools and the insights they received from their contacts with the school community. Even those who could not be assigned to the particular school in which they did their student teaching state that their experience in Project 120 has been an important factor in making a successful beginning in teaching.

How the Program Contributes to the Improvement of Teacher Education:

Perhaps the most important outcome of Project 120 has been the stimulus it has provided for a wide variety of studies and projects at the college, each attacking various phases of the problem of preparing teachers for urban schools, and the pervasive but less specifically identifiable feedback into the rest of the professional sequence that has occurred.

A similar type of pilot program in student teaching, involving six elementary schools, has been established, with appropriate adaptations to the elementary level.

A curriculum study center for teacher education has been established with the assistance of funds granted by the President's Committee on Delinquency and Youth Crime. Under the rubric of Project TRUE (Teachers and Resources for Urban Education), this center has prepared curriculum materials for teacher education classes and in-service institutes. These include bibliographies, readings, descriptive and analytical text materials, kinescopes, video and audio tapes, and still pictures. (See Annex 3, pp. 19-21, for list.) Some of these materials are already being tried out in both undergraduate and graduate Education courses at the college.

The Project English Curriculum Development Center at Hunter College, established under contract with the U.S. Office of Education, is the only one of the 12 such centers in the nation that is focused directly on the needs of disadvantaged pupils. It is identifying and preparing materials for the junior high school and upper elementary grades, as well as preparing kinescopes and teaching guides to demonstrate effective classroom practices for work with a disadvantaged school population. An experimental set of reading materials is currently being field tested in cooperating schools (see Annex 4, part 1 and part 2); demonstration lessons are being recorded on video tape and tried out in Education courses at the college.

Plans are underway to revise admission policies of the Hunter College Elementary School, a school for the gifted administered by the teacher education program of the College, to develop an experimental program for potentially gifted children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Project 120 has exerted influence beyond the College and the metropolitan New York area. It has been studied by teacher education institutions in metropolitan areas in other parts of the country, as they plan for programs to prepare teachers for urban schools.

The contributions of Project 120 to the improvement of teacher education in urban areas are only beginnings, but they do represent tangible results of the comitment of one urban institution to seek solutions to the problems of educating disadvantaged children and youth.